

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: A.

Date: May 25, 2005

Topic: First Review of a Request for Approval of an Innovative Program Involving Opening Prior to Labor Day from the Alexandria City School Board

Presenter: Ms. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications
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Origin:

 Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

 X Board review required by

 X State or federal law or regulation

 Board of Education regulation

 Other: _____

 Action requested at this meeting Action requested at future meeting: _____

(date)

Previous Review/Action:

 X No previous board review/action

 Previous review/action

date _____

action _____

Background Information:

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, at 8 VAC 20-131-290, permit local school boards to seek approval to implement experimental or innovative programs that do not conform to accreditation standards or other regulations promulgated by the Board and allow waivers of some Board regulations. The request must contain information that includes, but is not limited to, the purpose and objectives of the program, a description of the program, the number of students affected, the anticipated outcomes, and the evaluation procedures for measuring student achievement.

Section 22.1-79.1 of the Code of Virginia prohibits local school boards from adopting school calendars that require schools to open prior to Labor Day unless a waiver is granted by the Board for "good cause." The conditions under which the Board may grant such waivers are outlined in the Code. Part 3 of ' 22.1-79.1, as follows, permits the Board to approve a waiver from the requirements of this Code provision if the division receives approval of an experimental or innovative program when:

A school division is providing its students, in the school year for which the waiver is sought, with an experimental or innovative program which requires an earlier opening date than that established in subsection A of this section and which has been approved by the Department of Education pursuant to the regulations of the Board of Education establishing standards for accrediting public schools. However, any waiver or extension of the school year granted by the Board of Education pursuant to this subdivision or its standards for accrediting public schools for such an experimental or innovative program shall only apply to the opening date for those schools where such experimental or innovative programs are offered generally to the student body of the school. For the purposes of this subdivision, experimental or innovative programs shall include instructional programs which are offered on a year-round basis by the school division in one or more of its elementary or middle or high schools.

The following school divisions have been approved for year-round school schedules or modified calendars for the 2005-2006 school year: Arlington (one school), Danville (five schools), Fairfax County (10 schools), Prince Edward County (three schools), and Virginia Beach (four schools).

Summary of Major Elements:

The Alexandria City School Board is requesting approval of a modified school calendar for the Mount Vernon Elementary School. Approximately 45 percent of Mount Vernon students are in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, 69 percent are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and 50 percent are enrolled in the Dual Language Program. The school division's goal is to maximize achievement for all students. The school division believes the modified school calendar would provide help for those students who need it most and minimize learning loss for all students. Parents who do not want their child to attend this school with its modified calendar may chose a school with a traditional school calendar.

If approved by the Board of Education, the modified school calendar at Mount Vernon Elementary School will begin on Monday, August 1, 2005 and continue through Thursday, June 22, 2006. There will be an intersession with remedial and enrichment activities at the end of each of the first three grading periods. Students who do not show mastery of the objectives taught during the previous nine weeks will be required to attend the intersession and will spend half of their day in remedial activities and half in enrichment activities. The school division will not charge these students a fee. Students who have met the academic objectives may choose to attend the sessions. However, the school division will charge them a modest attendance fee. The school superintendent may waive that fee for families who can demonstrate that it will create a financial hardship.

This request is consistent with other modified calendar proposals approved by the Board. A copy of the complete package submitted by the Alexandria City School Board is attached.

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board receive the request for first review.

Impact on Resources: None

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Final review of the request will be conducted at the June Board of

Education meeting. In accordance with requirements adopted by the Board of Education, if this waiver is approved, the school division is required to evaluate the effectiveness of the program if the division seeks an extension of the approval for the next school year. Staff of the Department of Education will review the evaluation prior to making a recommendation to the superintendent of public instruction regarding the renewal of the approval.